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In 1860, the State of Texas was reputed to be a land of opportunity and was experiencing rapid settlement. The past decade had seen the population increase three-fold. There were now 151 counties that stretched along the entire Rio Grande boundary and, elsewhere, covered the state as far as the 100th meridian (the line that marks the eastern limit of the Panhandle). Within this organized area there were several distinctive agricultural regions: the eastern and southeastern part of the state was characterized by extensive cotton production; the central and northern portion was the site of diversified agriculture; while the western and southwestern section had a combination of subsistance food crops and stock raising.[1]

Texas was most heavily settled in the eastern and southeastern area, where a number of cotton plantations had been established. Several factors worked to restrict extensive cotton production to this zone. First of all was the matter of soil fertility. Early agriculturalists maintained that high fertility was indicated by heavy stands of native hard wood timber. Because of this, prospective planters invested much time and labor in killing heavy underbrush, and in girdling and burning trees so as to clear these timbered tracts for planting. Relatively clean land was avoided; it was "obviously infertile," and its hard packed prairie type soil was frequently too difficult for the crude, early plows to break.[2]

A second limiting factor to large scale cotton planting was rainfall. This was of special importance in the latter years of the 1850's because Texas was suffering from a drought cycle. Even the very optimistic *Texas Almanac* of 1861 reluctantly had to admit that the 97 degree line (running almost through Dallas) had now come to mark the start of the drought hazard region. A final key factor that limited the great cotton plantation area involved transportation considerations. Because of a serious lack of adequate railway facilities, and because of the prohibitive costs of overland ox-cart hauling, cotton producers wisely chose to locate their lands on the lower navigable limits of the Texas river systems.[3]

Mainly because of these reasons, the ideal plantations were developed in the river valleys of the state: the Guadalupe, the Colorado, the Brazos, the Trinity, the Neches, the Sabine, and the Red. But even within these individual valleys there were further limiting factors. For example, coastal marsh lands were prominent near the mouths of rivers that emptied into the Gulf in the southeastern corner of the state. These lands obviously had to be avoided. And, even in the fertile heartland of some of the valleys, navigational peculiarities of the rivers caused local transportation difficulties that discouraged planters from locating there. Such was the case in the lower Trinity River valley. It was noted that rains along the lower Trinity would mostly flow off to raise the neighboring San Jacinto and Neches rivers. In order for the Trinity to reach a safe depth for steamboats, heavy rains far upstate were required. Such rains were not too dependable, causing much concern for the farmers and steamboat captains involved.[4] After

all, an absence of adequate rainfall in the upper Trinity basin could well force an overland marketing of the cotton. At standard freight rates of 20¢ per ton mile, a trip of 100 miles would absorb the profits of 11¢ cotton.[5]

While the term "East Texas" today refers to a way of life as much as a geographical region, several learned publications have bravely offered a rough boundary line for "East Texas." According to the *Handbook of Texas*, this dividing line runs along a lazy arc from Red River County (on the Oklahoma border) through Leon County, and then on down to Galveston Bay.[6] Based on the 1860 development of Texas, this zone included at least 36 counties, and extended sufficiently far west to include major portions of: Red River, Titus, Wood, Smith, Anderson, Leon, Madison, Grimes, Montgomery, Harris and Galveston counties. In terms of population, these counties included over 34% of the white population of Texas, while over 43% of the slaves resided there.[7]

Based on 1860 census reports, these East Texas counties varied widely in agricultural and economic success. Counties considered "poor" in cotton production and almost completely lacking in plantation development were: Chambers, Galveston, Hardin, Harris, Jefferson, Orange, Madison, and Wood. Of these, all but the last two consisted of coastal marsh lands. As for Madison and Wood counties, they were both located in such positions as to have no ready access to dependable river transportation. In these eight "poor" cotton counties there were but 51 holders of over 20 slaves and only two farms of over 500 acres in size.

On the other hand, "rich" East Texas cotton counties included: Walker, Polk, Montgomery, Harrison, Bowie, and Grimes. Each of these had immediate or short land haul access to navigable streams. While only a half dozen in number, these counties contained over ⅓ of the sizable slave holdings in East Texas, and this same county group had over 40% of the land holdings above 500 acres to be found in East Texas. Nearly ⅓ of East Texas' vast cotton crop was produced in these six very rich counties.

The remaining counties ranged widely between these two great agricultural extremes. Some, such as San Augustine, Rusk, and Cass counties included an impressive number of plantations. Others, such as Angelina, Nacogdoches, and Trinity counties had very few planters in their impressive populations of yeomen farmers.

Although faint signs of a political cleavage between East Texas and the western part of the state came to light in the middle 1850's,[8] by the latter part of the decade these intra-state points of controversy had become far overshadowed by national problems that were shaking the Union to its very foundation. Consistent outspoken critic of extreme sectional views was Sam Houston. In 1857, the old hero, while still serving his final two years as United States Senator, was defeated in his race for governor of Texas. In 1859, however, Houston managed to capitalize on a lull in extremist feelings and to win the gubernatorial election of that year. Later in 1859, the short period of relative sectional calm came to an abrupt termination with John Brown's raid. Inflamed Southern tempers hit the boiling point. In Texas, this was clearly indicated on the political scene in December, when the enraged legislature selected Louis T. Wigfall to fill a vacancy in the United States Senate. Wigfall, a resident of Marshall since 1848, was the greatest Southern extremist in the state and had long been a blood

political enemy of Sam Houston. His elevation was an obvious and blantant affront to the governor and to Unionism.

Brown's raid caused Southern sensitivities to burn with emotionalism. Throughout the South there were protest mass meetings and wholesale denunciations of his "abolitionist scheme." This was true, also, in East Texas, where, for example, a meeting of citizens was held at Palestine (Anderson County) in late December. The townspeople roundly damned the "covert, dark, unholy, and fanatical" plot of abolitionists to infiltrate the South in the guise of peddlers and teachers. A board was established to seize and publicly to burn all dangerous books. Vigilance committees were authorized to seek out abolitionist spies. The town merchants were enjoined to cease all purchases from anti-slavery business houses of the North. In addition, teachers of Northern birth were only to be hired when "by long residence among us we know their soundness." Finally, there was to be a suppression of all music adjudged to be "dangerous to and subversive of the Constitutional rights and liberties of the South!"[9]

Events of 1860 brought even more vividly to East Texas imaginations the horrors to be expected from abolitionist inspired slave revolts. That summer saw a number of very destructive fires break out in northeastern Texas. Towns such as Henderson, Dallas, Denton, Waxahachie, and Jefferson reported either actual fires or confirmed attempts at incendiary actions. While conservative elements in the state denied that the fires had taken place or else claimed them to have been accidental, the *Texas Republican* newspaper of Marshall revealed the East Texas reaction to the fire reports:

> **Whatever exaggerations there may have been in the recent incendiary movements (and we admit there have been many exaggerations) in Texas, one thing is evident, they have been too numerous to have resulted from accident. Over a million of dollars worth of property has been destroyed in the course of a few weeks. And if we are to place any reliance in the testimony elicited by an examination of the negroes, all these outrages were the work of abolition emissaries.**[10]

Citizens of Carthage (Panola County) were typical of worried East Texans when they held a mass meeting and petitioned the County Court to set up a county-wide patrol system, to search all Negro quarters for weapons, to guard slaves closely and to keep them away from towns, to clear all wooded town lots that might conceal troublemakers, to punish groups of three or more slaves away from home (even if they had passes), and to organize defensive volunteer militia forces.[11]

In Jacksonville (Cherokee County), the resurrected patrol system was reinforced with an all-night alert of white men on the night of a rumored attempt at slave revolt.[12]

The neighboring states of Arkansas and Louisiana expressed grave concern over near revolts and real fires reported in northeastern Texas. The Van Buren *Press* carried the glaring warning: "Fearful Abolition Raid—Insurrection of Negroes—Ossawotamee Brown Among Us—Northern Texas to be Laid Waste—the Work Already Commenced."[13] While the sturdy New Orleans *Picayune* solemnly advised its readers not to purchase slaves from the "tainted districts" of Texas where fires and near rebellions proved that the Negroes had been "tampered with."[14]

With events thus set, the election of 1860 drew near. Texas delegates to the Democratic Convention at Charleston, South Carolina, walked out with the lower South and subsequently supported the candidacy of Breckinridge as standard bearer for the Southern Democrats. At Chicago, citizens of the Lone Star State were highly incensed to learn that eight Texas delegates had presented themselves before the Republican Convention. So unsympathetic was Texas with the Republican Party that a movement was started among Texas newspapers to publicize the names and to prepare fitting punishments for these eight "abolitionist dastards who dared to misrepresent this State, in the Black Republican convention."[15] Elsewhere, in Baltimore, two Texans represented the state at the Constitutional Union Convention. One of these Texans was a rather hairy character named Colonel A. B. Norton, who had sworn twelve years earlier neither to shave nor to cut his hair until Henry Clay was elected President of the United States. Both Norton and his Texas associate pushed for the nomination of Sam Houston by this conservative, almost pitiful group. On the second ballot, however, John Bell of Tennessee was given the nomination.

Finally, amidst threats and boasts of secession, amidst burning editorials that sought to invoke the words of American immortals to support all sides of the arguments at hand, amidst deep fears over the safety of property and lives, the people of Texas made their ways to the polls. Texas ballots offered but two choices of names in the election—Breckinridge, candidate of the strong Southern rights faction that was now recognized as the Southern Democrats, and Bell, conservative candidate of the Constitutional Union Party.

In over-all voting figures, East Texas showed a slight above-the-average participation in the election. Support for Bell (22.4% of East Texas votes) was a little below the state average of 24.4% for the Constitutional Unionist candidate. No East Texas county gave Bell a majority. However, he carried between ¼ to ⅓ of the vote in 13 counties. These counties fall into four categories on the basis of their agricultural productivity. "Poor" farm counties offering significant support for Bell were: Galveston, Harris, and Wood. But, commercial interests in both Galveston and Harris counties doubtlessly had quite an influence on the voting. Wood County, "poor" in agriculture and with no commerce at stake, defies explanation for its minority support of Bell. Similarly, there is no ready explanation for the two small farmer counties of Angelina and Nacogdoches, both of which offered strong minority favor for Bell. The remaining counties were either the "rich" planter counties of Bowie, Grimes, Harrison, and Montgomery, or the large farmer counties of Marion, Red River, Cass, and Rusk. The fact that these counties showed an interest in Bell suggests a feeling of conservatism among those with well-established plantations and large farms. These individuals had large slave holdings, were producing considerable numbers of profitable bales, and, in some cases, were of the old conservative Whig tradition.[16]

In all of East Texas there were but four counties that offered Bell over ⅓ of their votes. These were: Angelina and Nacogdoches, small farmer counties; Red River, a large farmer county; and Harrison, a planter county. Obviously, no trend is evident here.

When the national election results were made known and Lincoln and the "Black Republicans" were declared winners, a powerful reaction

was seen throughout the South. State flags replaced the national ensign, mass meetings were again held, and the name of Lincoln was uttered like a curse. East Texas reaction was typified by Marshall (Harrison County):

> **The excitement in Marshall, upon the news of Lincoln's election, has never been surpassed if equalled, within the brief history of the Lone Star State. Judging from our exchanges, the people were not more temperate in other localities of this, & other Southern States. . . . A pole was in readiness upon the reception of the news, at the top of which to hoist the Lone Star flag. The sad intelligence as anticipated came, and up went the Star, followed by shouts, firing of cannon and the uptossing of hats, old and new.[17]**

This outburst was followed by a series of speeches in which one citizen, Gil McKay, declared: "Yes, fellow-citizens of Texas, I can't say as I once could, fellow-citizens of the United States. I say it in sorrow, but I am no longer a citizen of the United States."[18]

The Cherokee County courthouse was topped with a Texas flag, while an effigy of Lincoln hung on the northwest corner of the courthouse square.[19]

A Harrison County mass meeting indicted the North for such offenses as breaking the Constitution by ignoring the Fugitive Slave law, limiting slave holding rights in territories, packing the Supreme Court to secure a reversal of the Dred Scott decision, eventually wanting to end slavery, encouraging slave revolts, electing a sectional president, and charging that the South had no right to secede. Because of these manifold crimes, the meeting went on record as preferring:

> **. . . restoration to that independence for which she [Texas] once enjoyed, to the ignomy ensuing from sectional dictation, sorrowing for the mistake she has committed in sacrificing her independence at the alter of her patriotism, she should unfurl again the banner of the "Lone Star" to the breeze and re-enter upon a national career, where if no glory awaits her, she will at least be free from a subjection, by might, to wrong and shame.[20]**

Finally, to add to the Texans' confusion, fear, and insecurity, East Texas suddenly became a prime recruiting grounds for the Knights of the Golden Circle. "General" George W. L. Bickley spent the last two months of 1860 there enrolling young men in his movement. As popularly advertised, the order stood as a Southern counterpart to the "Wide Awakes," a Republican young men's auxiliary that was denounced as a militaristic command formed "to enforce Black Republican misrule upon the South."[21]

By December, because of Sam Houston's refusal to follow the example of the lower Southern states in calling for a Secession Convention, four leading Texas citizens issued a call for voters to select delegates to a state Secession Convention that was called to order in late January. On February 1, the body approved an Ordinance of Secession and asked for the people of Texas to ratify the adoption of the document by a general election to be held on February 23. Meanwhile, before the voice of the people could be heard, the Convention's watchdog Committee of Public Safety secured the surrender of Federal military posts in the state and made arrangements for the evacuation of United States soldiers normally assigned to the District of Texas. It was also during this interim period that the Convention's

delegation arrived in Montgomery, Alabama, to represent Texas in the forming of the Provisional Confederate Government.

As the day for the popular vote on secession drew near, the newspapers of Texas did what they could to shape opinions. While a very few sheets asked for cool heads and second thinking on the folly of disunion and possible rebellion, the great bulk of editors pointed out the advantages of independence and called on Texas to meet its responsibility in giving the lower South a solid front in the secession movement. Typical of East Texas press appeals in favor of the Ordinance was that of the Marshall *Texas Republican:*

> **The Constitution of our country . . . has been trampled in the dust. The federative system inaugurated by it . . . is destroyed! An abolition President is about to be inaugurated—a man who is surrounded by the advocates of John Brown, the endorsers of Helper, the proclaimers of the "irrepressible conflict" and the equality of the races. He and his party are pledged to our subjugation, and threatens us with the sword is we dare to resist.**[22]

As for the grim prophesy that disunion would be followed by war, the average newspaper cast severe doubt on this possibility. One editor explained:

> **But we have never believed, and do not yet, that war can or will take place. If the Black Republicans provoke it, they will soon find their mistake, and from being the invaders, their country will be entered triumphantly by a Southern army.**[23]

Other Texas editors took the threat of war so lightly that they playfully repeated lampooning reports from papers of the lower South:

> **Charleston, Supper-time, Jan. 15—All babies in the entire South are in arms, and many in the city are now employed at the breastworks.**[24]

In late February, the popular referendum on the Secession Ordinance took place. The Convention then re-assembled in early March, canvassed the votes, and announced that secession had been carried by a majority of three to one.

East Texans, like their fellow citizens throughout the state, cast considerably fewer ballots in this election than they had cast in the recent presidential contest. The counties of the east staunchly supported secession with an overwhelming vote of almost nine to one. Only Angelina County in all of East Texas voted against secession. Angelina had likewise given Bell a strong minority vote in the earlier election. Eleven counties voted over 10% against secession. These were the "poor" agricultural counties of Hardin, Harris, and Wood; the small farmer counties of Angelina, Nacogdoches, Sabine; and Titus; the large farmer county of Leon; and the "rich" planter counties of Montgomery and Walker. Six of these counties had given Bell significant support in 1860.[25]

Five East Texas counties were sufficiently cool towards secession to offer over 25% of their votes against it. Of these five, only Red River and Titus had farms over 500 acres (15 in all), and only they had substantial holdings

of over 20 slaves. In all five of the counties there were but 73 such slave holders. Hardin and Wood counties were "poor" agricultural areas with no indication of plantation development. Small farmer Angelina County was consistently a rebel that defies explanation.

The bulk of these "cool toward secession" counties formed a block in northeastern Texas. This was one of the few parts of Texas inhabited by individuals of Northern backgrounds and with Northern ties.[26] As war developed, many of these persons packed their wagons and headed out of the state. One traveler, journeying through this part of Texas, noted that in a one-day period he passed an estimated 500 wagons that were moving northward across the state boundary.[27]

Thus the record stands. Noticeable trends for East Texas were these:

1. In the election of 1860 there was a slight favoring for the conservative candidate Bell in several planter and large farmer counties. However, the over-all trend for East Texas was quite representative of the whole state's voting pattern in this election.
2. In the secession election, East Texas showed an overwhelming unanimity for secession. While the state favored disunion by a three to one vote, East Texas supported it almost nine to one. East Texas counties least enthusiastic towards secession were generally "poor" or small farmer, and were mostly located in a block in the northern part of the sector.
3. East Texas' strong stand in favor of secession was also reflected by its very powerful support of the Southern Cause during the resulting Civil War. East Texas provided a tremendous number of volunteer regiments for the South. East Texas exhibited none of the organized pockets of disloyalty to be found in western and southwestern Texas. East Texas was the site of the most notable prisoner of war camps in the state (Camp Ford and Camp Groce). East Texas was the location of several depots and headquarters installations for the Department of the Trans-Mississippi West (such as a financial and repair center near Marshall and a beef packing plant at Jefferson). East Texas provided Kirby Smith's unofficial alternate headquarters at Marshall. East Texas furnished a seat for the Missouri Confederate capital in exile. East Texas was the scene of the Confederacy's most spectacular small-scale victory (at Sabine Pass). In short, East Texas took a strong stand on secession and then willingly did its utmost to meet the bloody consequences to follow.

NOTES

[1]Agricultural regions have been plotted on the basis of 1860 census information. *Agriculture of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1884), pp. 140-49.

[2]Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey to Texas* (New York: Dix, Edwards and Co., 1857), *passim.* Captain Flack, *The Texan Rifle-Hunter* (London: Darton and Co., 1857), pp. 61-62.

[3]*Texas Almanac—1861* (Galveston: Richardson and Co., 1860), p. 189.
[4]*Ibid.*, pp. 122-26.

[5]Charles W. Ramsdell, "Internal Improvements Projects in Texas in the 1850's" in *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, IX, pt. 1., pp. 99-100.

[6]*The Handbook of Texas* (Austin: The Texas State Historical Association, 1952), I, pp. 534-35.

[7]Figures taken from *Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), *passim.*

[8]Charles W. Ramsdell, "The Frontier and Secession" in *Studies in Southern History and Politics Subscribed to William Archibald Dunning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1914), *passim.*

[9]Trinity Advocate (Palestine), Jan. 4, 1860 in Ollinger Crenshaw, *The Slave States in the Presidential Election of 1860* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1945), p. 90.

[10]*Texas Republican* (Marshall), Sept. 8, 1860.

[11]*Ibid.*, Aug. 18, 1860.

[12]Hattie J. Roach, *A History of Cherokee County* (Dallas: Southwest Press, 1934), p. 61.

[13]David Y. Thomas, *Arkansas in War and Reconstruction 1861-1874* (Little Rock: Arkansas Division, United Daughters of the Confederacy, 1926), p. 23.

[14]*Evening Picayune* (New Orleans), Aug. 18, 1860 in William W. White, "The Texas Slave Insurrection of 1860" in *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LII, No. 3, Jan. 1949, pp. 279-80.

[15]*The Seguin Mercury*, May 30, 1860.

[16]Figures taken from W. Dean Burnham, *Presidential Ballots 1836-1892* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1955), pp. 764-812.

[17]*The Harrison Flag* (Marshall), Nov. 24, 1860.

[18]*Ibid.*

[19]Roach, *Cherokee County*, p. 61.

[20]*Texan Republican* (Marshall), Dec. 1, 1860.

[21]*Ibid.*, Nov. 17, 1860. Jimmie Hicks, "Some Letters Concerning the Knights of the Golden Circle in Texas, 1860-1861" in *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LXV, No. 1, July, 1961, p. 81.

[22]*Texas Republican* (Marshall), Feb. 23, 1861.

[23]*Ibid.*, March 2, 1861.

[24]*The Southern Confederacy* (Seguin), March 8, 1861.

[25]Figures taken from Executive Record Book, No. 279, pp. 222-23. Texas State Archives.

[26]Charles W. Ramsdell, *Reconstruction in Texas* (New York: Columbia University, 1910), pp. 11-12.

[27]Annie H. Abel, *Indians as Secessionists* (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1915), p. 95. *The Southern Confederacy*, June 7, 1861.

ANNEX

Over-All Figures

	White	*Slave*
Texas Population, 1860	421,294	182,921
East Texas Population, 1860	143,294	79,553
Texas Cotton Production, 1860		431,463
East Texas Cotton Production, 1860		258,592

East Texas Voting, 1860: Bell—5,265; Breckinridge—18,621.
East Texas Voting, 1861: Secession—17,869; Anti-Secession—2,120.

EAST TEXAS IN 1860

LEGEND

A—Boundary of East Texas
B—"Poor" cotton production
C—"Rich" planter counties
D—Large farmer counties
E—Small farmer counties
F—¼ to ⅓ for Bell
G—Over ⅓ for Bell
H—Over 10% against secession
I—Over 25% against secession